

UVA'S ADMINISTRATION HAS WILLFULLY IGNORED ITS LONGSTANDING ANTISEMITISM PROBLEM

BY JOEL GARDNER

The *Daily Progress* recently reported on perhaps the most staggering antisemitic incident in what has become a long list of antisemitic incidents at the University of Virginia.

According to the story, a Jewish student had been continuously subjected to antisemitic ridicule and bullying by one of his housemates, which culminated in written threats and ultimately the alleged perpetrator brandishing a gun at him in his own room. The target of these threats courageously reported the incident to the police and the alleged offender was arrested, released on bail and reportedly suspended from classes. Another housemate who allegedly supplied the perpetrator with the gun was also suspended from classes.

Quite an outrageous story—but one you wouldn't know about if you hadn't read it in the *DP*—because neither the UVA administration nor any of its news organs has publicly commented on it. This is not surprising since this has been the administration's modus operandi when it comes to antisemitic behavior. Yet given the fact that three UVA students were murdered by a handgun just two years ago, one would expect a serious public reaction to this event by the administration.

The truth is that UVA has had a longstanding antisemitism problem that was exponentially exacerbated following the brutal massacres in Israel that occurred on October 7, 2023. The fact is that UVA's administration has watched as one serious antisemitic incident after another occurred after 10/7 without public comment as to the antisemitic nature of these incidents — and perhaps even worse, it has consistently refused to admit that antisemitism on Grounds is a distinct and singular problem. For proof, as one famous sports commentator in NYC used to say, "Let's go to the videotape".

I have often found that a statistical chart or graph is frequently worth more than the proverbial thousand words. So let's start with the following chart prepared by the ill-fated task force on religious diversity (more on this "task force" later) created by the administration as a smokescreen to avoid dealing with its antisemitism problems head-on:

Reported Incidents of Bias, Discrimination, & Harassment

YEAR	TTL	Judaism	Islam	Sikhism	Hinduism	Christianity	Not Identified
23-24*	56	33	9	-	1	2	11
22-23	22	9	6	-	-	3	4
21-22	11	-	5	1	-	-	5
20-21	12	4	2	-	-	1	5
19-20	12	3	4	-	-	-	5
18-19	16	12	2	-	1	-	1
17-18	19	12	5	-	-	-	2

*As of May 9, 2024; during AY 23-24 reports with potential connection to religion represented roughly 17% of all reports assessed by the Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights.

Source: Office of Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights

As one can readily note, religious bias incidents against Jews at UVA over the past seven academic years through spring 2024 dwarfs that of any other religious group. And this was true even prior to 10/7. For the six preceding academic years, antisemitic bias incidents were 43% of the total and almost twice as many as the next highest category. This statistic corroborates statements by a group of Jewish parents who met earlier this year with President Ryan who related that antisemitism had been an issue before 10/7. But what jumps off the page are the statistics for the last academic year. Antisemitic incidents were well more than half of all religious bias incidents, and significantly almost 4X the number of Islamophobic incidents. Indeed, the number of antisemitic incidents in 2023–24 alone is equal to all Islamophobic incidents for the entire 7-year period combined. And yet, our administration rarely if ever mentions antisemitism without referencing Islamophobia in the same sentence. Perhaps this more starkly than anything exemplifies this administration's failure to ever recognize antisemitism as a distinct and singular problem. It is important to remember that while antisemitic acts represent a preponderance of all religious incidents, the Jewish student population of UVA is only 6–8% of the total.

While statistics are important, the facts representing actual events and behavior are even more so. And the facts in this regard are so powerful that a retelling of some of the major incidents is important to demonstrate the malfeasance of the administration in reacting to the material antisemitic behavior on Grounds.

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Even just recounting the major incidents will probably make this article longer than I originally intended. But before recounting these specific events, I believe it is pertinent to discuss what type of words and/or behavior amounts to antisemitism. As a Jew growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust, I was confronted with antisemitic behavior more than a few times in my life. And similar to Supreme Court Justice Stewart's famous comment in the *Jacobellis* obscenity case, “I know it when I see it”. But to judge the behavior of college administrators, a more precise definition is appropriate. And that definition was definitively provided for UVA when the Commonwealth adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (“IHRA”) definition of antisemitism on May 8, 2023. The IHRA definition includes several examples of antisemitic rhetoric and behavior including the following:

“Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.”

Since UVA is a state university, it is mandated to uphold this definition. Tuck that away as we proceed with an analytical review of the abominable behavior that unfolded at UVA following October 7, 2023.

The horrors of October 7, 2023, represented the greatest slaughter and tragedy for the Jewish people since the end of World War II. Few incidents in modern history can represent the widespread wanton murder, sexual assault, debased torture, and violent kidnapping that was inflicted on innocent civilians at home or enjoying a musical festival. The brutality and inhumanity of that day viscerally affected virtually every Jewish person throughout the world, including that community of students and faculty living in Charlottesville. Incredibly what emerged from this horror, was not a wave of sympathy for our Jewish community, but rather an immediate avalanche of antisemitic attacks. Within days of the 10/7 attacks, and well before the Israeli armed forces began a material response, the antisemitic attacks against the Jewish community began on Grounds. On October 11, only four days after the atrocities which personally affected numerous Jewish members of the community, a group of Jewish students felt it necessary to send an open letter to the student newspaper *The Cavalier Daily* in which they stated: "We, as Jewish students at the University, are profoundly disappointed, disturbed and scared". A rational person would think that a college administrator when confronted with an expression of fear from a minority group that had suffered an inordinate number of bias incidents in the past would take immediate meaningful action to defuse the atmosphere of fear. But the UVA administration did no such thing. They issued the obligatory cookie-cutter kumbaya verbiage and did absolutely nothing to specifically address the sense of loss and fear being felt by a devastated Jewish community that had just lost family and friends in the slaughter. And this was only the opening salvo in what would become an ongoing assault on the Wahoo Jewish community.

On October 12, 2023, exactly one day after the *CD* published the Jewish students' letter of fear, a "teach-in" demonstration was held on the steps of the Rotunda organized by the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). More than a hundred students and their supporters took part, many if not most masked, and shouts of "From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will be Free" reverberated across Mr. Jefferson's historic Academical Village. This demonstration was appalling for several reasons, and the administration's lack of response was equally disgraceful.

Below is the flyer advertising the SJP event:



Stunningly, the flyer pictures a Hamas bulldozer crashing through an Israeli security fence on the way to the slaughter, rape and torture of innocent men, women and children. In and of itself it is a reprehensible display of support for murder and violent sexual abuse, but perhaps even worse, it is very arguably a violation of Virginia law. It is a felony in Virginia to materially support a terrorist organization (Sec 18.2-46.5). The flyer and rhetoric used at the demonstration were clearly an endorsement of Hamas, a designated terrorist organization, and its murderous attack.

In addition, the “River to the Sea” chant is universally considered a call for the eradication of the State of Israel. As such it is deemed to be antisemitic rhetoric under the Commonwealth’s definition of antisemitism.

Less than two weeks later another demonstration was held on the Lawn, this time in the form of a “walkout”, organized again by the SJP and supported by numerous left-wing, race, gender, and ethnic student organizations. Once again most of the demonstrators were masked and once again the chant of “From the River to the Sea” echoed throughout UVA’s UNESCO World Heritage Site. But during this demonstration, a more menacing aspect was added as a Jewish student holding an Israeli flag was spat upon and shoved.

A Jewish professor who was present during the march told me that he was horrified. He could not believe they allowed masked demonstrators to march down the Lawn shouting threatening slogans. He noted that they never would have allowed demonstrators in white sheets and masks shouting racist slogans to march like that. He could understand why many students would be frightened by this incident as he thought the whole incident was scary.

The Chabad House rabbi at UVA sent a message to the administration stating,

“ I have been in this town serving college students for 23 years now. Never has there been a time like this. 10% of your population feels unprotected and vulnerable right now. Not just students. Members of your Faculty and Staff have reported to us as well. Anti-Semitic attacks are up 36% worldwide. And you are fostering a hate group that supports Hamas right on our Grounds. With tax dollars! How can you let this happen? A group that supports murder and rape of innocent people including grandparents and children?! You will let these groups foment hate and violence. They openly call for Jihad and the extermination of 6 million Jews with one chant "From the River to the Sea" What will have to happen before you wake up? What?? What will you be personally liable for if anyone is harmed when you don't quash these extremists? ”

The UVA administration had no comment as to the flyer, the antisemitic rhetoric being espoused, the concerns of the rabbi, or the support of Hamas. As the professor noted, would Madison Hall have remained silent if a white nationalist group held a demonstration on the Lawn advertised by a flyer showing a klansman holding a noose and chanting racist epithets? That is not a rhetorical question, since we know the answer to that.

In September 2022 a noose was found around the neck of the statue of Homer on the South Lawn. The administration went into immediate threat assessment mode and the police and even the FBI were called in to investigate.

President Ryan issued a public statement to the University community, stating: “The facts available indicate that this was an act intended to intimidate members of this community” and designated it a hate crime. Well, as it turned out the incident had nothing to do with racism or intimidation, but was meant to be a protest against the sexualization of young children.

What this incident demonstrates clear as day is the hypocrisy and double standards that have become a trademark of this administration. Find an ambiguous rope around the neck of a statue of an ancient Greek poet and you call in the FBI and designate it as a hate crime; have a group advertise a demonstration lauding the terrorists that murdered over 1,000 people and shout antisemitic epithets and you say and do nothing. The hypocrisy is staggering. This goes to the heart of freedom of expression. Acceptability of speech cannot be determined by who the speaker is.

But perhaps the most shocking “do and say nothing” attitude of the administration involved what was a clear breach of state law by the demonstrators at both the “teach-in” and “walk out.” Under a law dating back to the days of Ku Klux Klan activity, it is a felony in Virginia to wear a mask with the intent to conceal one’s identity. (Sec. 18.2-422) As noted earlier, many if not most of the demonstrators were masked—and the readily evident reason was to conceal their identity. A flyer handed out to the protesters before the event explicitly instructed the demonstrators to do so: “Wear a mask/hat/sunglasses to protect your identity.” So what does the administration do about this felonious behavior—absolutely nothing. According to those who raised this issue directly with the administration, they responded that it was the responsibility of the Commonwealth’s Attorneys to bring such charges, not that of the University. The local Commonwealth’s Attorneys’ position was that they would not enforce this law unless it was in connection with another crime. The administration’s response here was patently disingenuous at best. No one was asking them to prosecute the offenders—they were being asked to condemn such felonious behavior and take action to prevent it from happening again. No such luck.

As a postscript to this utter failure of leadership, as many other institutions began to adopt rules preventing masking, the administration finally decided to institute a new regulation ten months after the SJP demonstration and during the summer vacation. Accordingly, going forward, the University reserves the right to request photo identification of any person wearing a face mask on University property.

VIRGINIA

Lawn Hate Crime: Noose On Homer Statue Summons FBI

Police release security photos, offer \$10K for more information

By JUDY LE



The fact that this minor step was more form than substance was evident immediately after the new fall 2024 semester began when masked individuals appeared at continuing anti-Israel demonstrations and were not requested to provide identification. It was reported to me that when a highly placed member of the administration was asked why the new policy was not being enforced, she said that the regulation would not be enforced if the masked individual was present at an event approved by the administration—thus rendering the new rule virtually meaningless.

Another material aspect of the SJP “walkout” demonstration was that there were numerous reported incidents of faculty members vocally supporting the demonstration in their classrooms, including some who reportedly canceled classes or gave extra credit for those students attending even though instructions had come from the provost not to cancel classes. This has nothing to do with freedom of expression. At a state university, faculty should not be advocating for their own political or social agendas in the classroom. Can you imagine being a Jewish student sitting in such a classroom and having to suffer through this? I know from my discussions with Jewish parents that their children who were present during such diatribes were horrified and intimidated. At least one broke into tears describing the ordeal to her parents. And certainly, faculty members should not be canceling classes funded by the state and students’ tuition and in direct violation of the provost’s directive. Yet once again, not only did the administration fail to publicly disapprove of such faculty behavior, but it is my understanding from inside sources that other than a “talking to”, no actual punitive measures were taken against those who violated the provost’s mandate.

Yet, this would not be the worst behavior coming from the UVA faculty. Only two weeks after the SJP demonstration, a group of over 80 faculty members signed an “open letter” letter to the UVA community in which they stunningly asserted that *“we are so alarmed by approaches to this conflict that do not mention the context in which Oct. 7 occurred”*. This shameful statement went well beyond the statements that resulted in the firing of the presidents of Penn and Harvard. They said statements made during student demonstrations had to be taken in context; here these professors were claiming that the events of October 7 itself had to be viewed in context.

**THIS STATEMENT MAY HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE MOST DISGRACEFUL
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To think that over four-score UVA professors could have propounded that raping, dismembering, mutilating, and burning innocent people alive should be viewed in a historical context is virtually incomprehensible. And yet once again, the UVA administration had no comment whatsoever regarding this open letter. Does anyone seriously think that they would have remained silent if scores of faculty had said that segregation and lynchings should have been viewed in context? But as we shall see, this is not the end of this unfortunate story.

As the Grounds continued to be roiled by antisemitic behavior, the administration finally decided to take some action in December. Did they decide to create a task force specifically dedicated to antisemitic activity as was the case with schools like Columbia, Harvard, Penn, Indiana University, and Stanford? Not a chance. Rather, the administration created a “Task Force on Religious Diversity and Belonging”—thus once again failing to specifically recognize antisemitism as a distinct problem, while genuflecting to the altar of moral equivalence. But this would not be the most serious failure surrounding the creation of this spurious entity. In an amazingly grotesque gesture, two of the faculty signatories of the October “open letter” were appointed to this so-called task force.

Of all the insensitive and biased responses by the UVA administration to the explosive increase in antisemitism in the world, in the USA, and on Grounds this decision is perhaps the most stunning. It would have been like appointing Richard Spencer and Jason Kessler, the UVA graduates and leaders of the 2018 Unite the Right rally, to UVA’s Racial Equity Task Force created after George Floyd’s death. In the old country, this is known as real chutzpah. But the insanity doesn’t even end here. One of those faculty members had also argued in a public panel discussion that white supremacy and imperialism were outgrowths of Christianity. Just a fine choice for a task force on religious diversity and belonging—of course, unless you are Jewish or Christian.

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In the meantime, with antisemitism flourishing on Grounds, a group of Jewish parents was formed to educate the administration about the extent of the problem and seek remedial action. After numerous requests for a meeting, President Ryan finally acquiesced to a meeting—but incredibly limited attendance to four parents who were required to be accompanied by their student children. The parents’ group met with President Ryan on February 14, 2024, and arrived very well prepared. They discussed in detail the IHRA definition of anti-semitism, the importance of Israel to Jewish identity, the double standards applied to antisemitic bias incidents when compared to bias incidents involving other minority groups, actual student experiences of antisemitism on Grounds, and then proposed remedial action items.

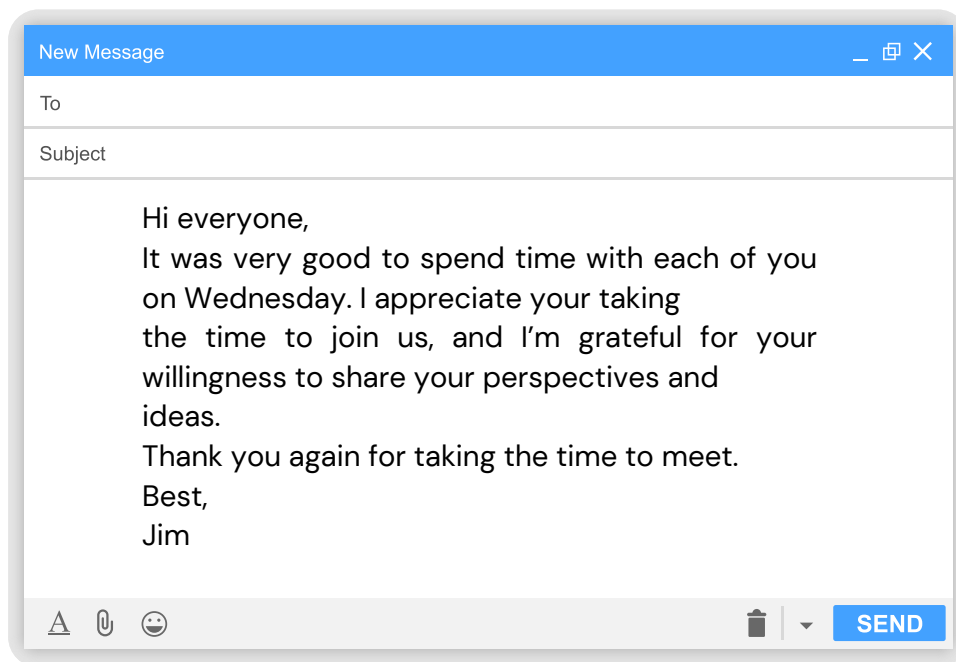
One of the presentation sections was entitled: “UVA’s Jewish community has been subject to blatant and widespread antisemitism, which violates UVA’s Preventing and Addressing Discrimination and Harassment policy. UVA has done nothing”.

In support of this, the students present detailed the numerous incidents of antisemitism they either were subjected to personally or witnessed. Among other things, it was made clear to those administrators present that it had reached a stage at UVA where Jewish students were afraid to wear their kippahs or Star of David necklaces in public.

UVA in 2024 had become akin to Berlin in 1938. I spoke to one of the parents after the meeting and was told that one of the mothers present was in tears as she listened to the evidence being presented. In conclusion, the parents group requested immediate remedial action by the administration including recognizing antisemitism as a distinct problem, the creation of a separate task force on antisemitism, and taking action regarding the violent antisemitic verbiage utilized by SJP.

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In response to the heartfelt and emotionally moving presentation and the pleas for remedial action, this is how President Ryan responded to the representatives of the parents' group:



It is hard to imagine that a more inconsequential, cookie-cutter, insulting response could have been crafted. Feckless leadership defined. But as it turns out, it didn't matter what he wrote, as he had no intention of doing anything meaningful anyway.

Meanwhile, as the UVA parents group was pleading for a meaningful response from the administration, another significant antisemitic act was reverberating on Grounds. The SJP and its “intersectional” collaborators had initiated an anti-Israel “BDS” (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) campaign in the form of a student referendum. First and foremost it is important to recognize that the United States Government has criticized BDS measures aimed at Israel as being antisemitic and to be particularly inappropriate and damaging in a university milieu. In November 2020 the US State Department promulgated a policy statement which asserted:

“

As we have made clear, anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism. The United States is, therefore, committed to countering the Global BDS Campaign as a manifestation of anti-Semitism.”

”

In 2019, a bipartisan resolution of the House of Representatives (H. Res. 246) was overwhelmingly passed by a vote of 398–17 which opposed BDS actions against Israel and very significantly recognized the dangers resulting from supporting such efforts on college campuses, stating in its “whereas” clauses:

“

Whereas university-based Global BDS efforts violate the core goals of the university and global cultural development, which thrive on free and open exchange and debate, and in some cases, leads to the intimidation and harassment of Jewish students and others who support Israel.

”

Despite the antisemitic nature of the proposed referendum and the nationally recognized dangers it created leading to “intimidation” and “harassment” of Jewish students, the UVA administration once again remained silent before the vote on the referendum.

But this was not the most disturbing aspect of the administration’s response to the BDS referendum—that would come after the votes were cast 67% in favor of the SJP proposal, further intimidating an already vulnerable Jewish community.

Shortly after the BDS vote, the Board of Visitors had its quarterly meeting, and President Ryan decided to break his silence by addressing the BOV on the subject of the referendum. He initially made the point that it is the policy of the administration not to speak publicly about student referendums until after the vote is held. I wonder when that unwritten policy came into being?

But if anyone seriously believes that this administration would have remained quiet in the face of a blatantly racist or anti-LGBTQ proposal, I have a bridge to sell you up here in NYC. Remember this is the same administration that took the position that a sign on a Lawn room door in large letters saying “F-ck UVA” (fully spelled out) was protected speech, but that a medical school student assiduously questioning the concept of microaggressions during a seminar was not freedom of expression (a viewpoint that was soundly rejected in court). However, it was what came next that truly revealed the mindset of the administration.

President Ryan then explained that if he had been a student he would have voted against the proposal—good so far—but he then explained why. He would have voted

against the proposal—not because it was antisemitic as the State Department proclaimed, or that it might lead to intimidation and harassment of the Jewish community as Congress noted—but because he was opposed to the concept of divestments. The fact that this was an antisemitic proposal never crossed his lips. However, he did note that: “There’s no doubt that, in part because of this referendum, some members of our community, including those who are Israeli or Jewish, are worried about how welcome they are at UVA”.

(I’m still wondering what other members of the UVA community other than Jews and Israelis would have felt unwelcome as a result of the referendum—perhaps UVIMCO, the investment arm of the University). Contrast [President Ryan’s statement](#) with one contemporaneously made by Virginia’s [Attorney General Jason Miyares](#), who wrote the BOV condemning the referendum vote. He noted that the BDS movement is inherently antisemitic and that “Just like direct attacks from Hamas, BDS poses an existential threat to the Jewish state”.

Thus, we have here another extraordinary example of the administration having failed to openly recognize antisemitic behavior for what it is and to admit that antisemitism is an ongoing significant problem at UVA.

Another defining moment illustrating UVA’s lack of concern for the continuing antisemitic activity on Grounds occurred at this very same BOV meeting in March. The agenda for a BOV meeting is prepared jointly by the Rector of the BOV and the President. Not surprisingly, the specific issue of antisemitism was not on the agenda. Nevertheless, several Board members commented on the ongoing antisemitic activity, one asserting that the BDS vote was a blatantly antisemitic event and “one of the most shameful things to happen in the history of the university.” Board member Bert Ellis stated that civil discourse was being threatened by the intimidating actions of SJP without condemnation by the administration: “But you cannot have a debate on our grounds right now the way we are allowing the rules to be abused.

The SJP (Students for Justice in Palestine) group will verbally abuse a Jewish student or parent for doing nothing but standing by. They will not allow a civil discourse, and we will not condemn them.”

However, the denouement of the attempt by some Board members to raise the specific issue of antisemitism at UVA came when Mr. Ellis urged that this issue be discussed in an open session. He was immediately and unceremoniously slapped down by the Rector, who said that this issue would only be discussed in a closed session. When Mr. Ellis continued to request that the discussion take place in public, the Rector threatened to reprimand him. It is very worthwhile to [watch the video](#) of the exchange between Mr. Ellis and Rector Hardie:



After viewing the video the following questions naturally arise: **Mr. Rector, why are you so afraid to discuss UVA’s antisemitism problems in public? Aren’t we reminded often to follow Mr. Jefferson’s dictum to “follow truth wherever it may lead?”**

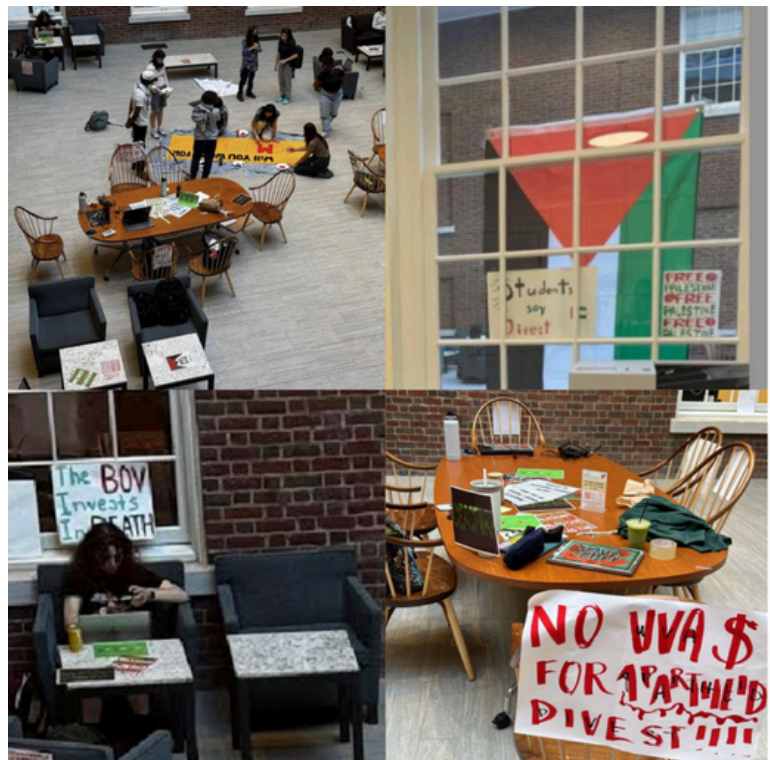
Following the BOV meeting and its attendant negative publicity for the powers that be, the administration attempted to defend its position. Arguments were made that the antisemitism problem at UVA wasn’t as bad as at some other colleges and that while antisemitic acts were occurring on Grounds, they were being exaggerated. As for the former point, while it may be true that some campuses such as Columbia had a worse antisemitism problem, it is akin to saying that Goering and Speer were not as bad as Himmler and Goebbels. As for the latter point, a contemporaneous op-ed by a student in the *Cavalier Daily* contradicted that viewpoint. It is worthwhile reading the entire article, but much of it can be summed up by the following excerpt:

***“[T]he reaction to antisemitism on the part of University administration and leadership has been woefully inadequate — it has both failed to offer effective solutions to help protect its Jewish community and has also neglected to discuss the issue in an open and approachable manner that involves the wider University community. The University must better protect and support Jewish students.*”**

Perhaps the exclamation point on judging the administration's futile attempts to defend its neglect and inaction was the grade the University received from the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) analysis of 85 American universities as to their willingness to protect Jewish students on campus which was published in April 2024. The ADL is probably the most well-known national Jewish organization in the USA and it not only advocates for Jewish individual rights but does so for every minority group in the country. It was a leader in the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 60s. Of the 85 universities graded, only 13 received an "F" grade—UVA being one of the 13. How ironic that the university founded by the author of the seminal Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom would receive an "F" grade for its failure to protect a religious minority. As a footnote, UVA's grade was upgraded to a "D" after the contentious tent encampment incident in the spring. Perhaps after learning of the University's silence following a Jewish student being threatened with a gun, the ADL will appropriately drop the grade to an "F-", if such a grade exists.

As the 2023–2024 academic year ended, many of us hoped that the summer recess would cool off the heated atmosphere on Grounds. For a while, the intensity level of incidents seemed to have diminished somewhat, although the beat of the antisemitic drum continued, as did the administration's silence. Demonstrations attended by masked participants popped up anew and a new venue for intimidation and harassment was found — the University library. A university library should be a place for learning, study, and contemplation. It should not be a stage for political incitement.

I first learned about this when I was informed by a parent that a Jewish student had gone to the library to study and was horrified to be confronted by a series of inflammatory posters—with the consequence that the upset student quickly left. Subsequently, I was shown photographs of the perpetrators using the library as a staging area for creating the posters as well as exhibiting them. I was particularly disturbed by this development as I had chaired a fundraising effort that had raised half a million dollars for the recent library renovation. I guess I had incorrectly assumed that the library would be one area of UVA that would not be politicized.



Meanwhile, a new low in threatening images was posted by the SJP after the death of Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas architect of 10/7. He is displayed holding a weapon and glorified as a leader, a martyr, and a fighter. Not surprisingly, there was no comment from the administration despite the clearly intimidating nature of the image:



And now we have the zenith of the antisemitic activities that have been going on for more than a year—a Jewish student being threatened in his room with a pistol in his face. This is undoubtedly the unintended but predictable result of the administration’s complete failure to confront head-on what is a distinct and discrete antisemitism problem unrelated to some generalized amorphous concept of religious inclusion. The volume and intensity of antisemitic activity on Grounds since 10/7 has far exceeded any comparable behavior toward any other group in the 58 years I have been associated with UVA. The verbal assaults, the social media harassment, and the masked intimidation—are unprecedented at UVA. And this is all happening amid the greatest outbreak of worldwide antisemitism since WWII.

So what will it take for the administration to publicly confront UVA’s antisemitism problem and take material remedial action? If threatening a Jewish student with a handgun won’t do it, perhaps it will take someone pulling the trigger the next time.